

Hilario Yanez – My American Story

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Hilario Yanez, and I am DACA Recipient. I was born in Tampico, Tamaulipas Mexico and at the age of one, my mother brought me to United States to give me a better life. I didn't have a choice in the matter. At the age of three my family became homeless and lived in a shelter called, "Star of Hope."

I grew up in a rough neighborhood without a father. My experience as a child and young adult was made more difficult because of my immigration status. Growing up undocumented was and continues to be a source of fear and uncertainty. I am a man of faith and my belief in God has never wavered, but when my life was so incredibly challenging, and not because of any decision I ever made, I used to blame God and ask him, "Why me"?

What it meant to live undocumented

My biggest fear was that if I did something wrong, anything, I would never see my mother again. I wanted to help my mother as any good son wants to do. I wanted to contribute to our great country, but as an undocumented teenager, I couldn't work part-time like many of my friends. I also couldn't obtain a driver's license. I would always rely on public transportation to get to where I needed to go. I never experienced what a real family vacation was like since I couldn't travel as well.

I never told anyone of my situation because I feared I would be seen as weak or a lesser person. Despite the circumstances I was dealt, I believe this is the greatest country on earth, one where hard work is rewarded. One where opportunity and hard work lead to success. All I needed was an opportunity.

2012 - DACA comes around

I graduated from high school in 2011 and ironically, DACA was implemented in 2012. I'll say this, I'm always going to be grateful for anyone that gives me an opportunity, no matter what. Doesn't matter if you are a Democrat, Republican, white, black, yellow, green, or blue. Thank you, former President Obama. We can all agree what former President Obama did was the right thing to do, but many have argued it was the wrong way to do it. The best way then, and today, is action by Congress.

After going through extensive background checks and biometrics, and paying a \$500 application fee, I was able to obtain a Social Security card and a 2-year work permit. I applied for a Driver's license and I am happy to report that I passed it on my first try. I also didn't have to fear being separated from my mother and friends. That's all I needed, this was my moment, the opportunity I had been waiting for. This was my shot to live the American Dream. I made sure to take it.

I found a job to pay for college. I took a leap of faith by transferring from a community college to a Tier 1 university, the University of Houston – Main campus. During my time at the university, I worked hard and was fortunate to intern with four different Fortune 500 companies. I went from making \$7.25 an hour to making close to \$30 an hour during my internships. This new income also meant I paid more in taxes and contributed to our economy in bigger ways. I bought my first car.

Life was good. I graduated with not one, but two bachelor's degrees in Management Information Systems and Supply Chain management. Now I stand in front of you all as a first-generation college graduate. I'm also a leader in my community and tithe every Sunday to my church. Because of DACA, I was not only able to dream the American Dream, I am living it, and breathing the American Dream. All I needed was just one shot.

With that being said, this dream could soon end. I don't know what life looks like long term. My permit expires a year from now and I don't know if I'll be able to work again or possibly live in the only country I call home. This does not only affect me, it affects my family, employer, community, my church, schools, jobs and businesses across this country.

The reality is, your kids and I are no different - we all pledged allegiance to our beautiful American flag, we all get chills down our spines when we sing the National Anthem, we watch the same shows (The Office), we are educated in the same school systems from an early age and we root for the same sports teams (Everyone roots for Houston Rockets? Right?). I could easily be your son and you all in this room could be my mother, father, brother or sister.

I didn't choose where I was born. I didn't choose to come to the United States, but America is my home. This is the only place on earth where a kid like me can go from living in a homeless shelter, to working at a Fortune 500 company. I love this country. I'd be willing to lay my life to protect our freedom. It would be an honor for me to serve our military and give back to this country.

Time to take Action Now

The toughest policy issues call for honest, clear, and bold solutions. DACA is an American issue, not a Democrat or Republican issue. If we can't solve that soon, there will be a ripple effect across this country. My life and the life of hundreds of thousands of other people just like me hang on the balance.

Our lives should not be decided by executive actions, or court decisions. I am asking both parties of Congress to act now. I am not done with my American Dream. I am only getting started, and I urge both parties of congress to give me an opportunity to continue to thrive in the land of opportunity.

I'll end with this, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Collins, members of the Committee – I challenge you and your colleagues in the House and Senate to put your political views aside and work with each other on behalf of the American people. The House of Representatives will vote soon on Dreamer protection, which is a good starting point. I hope that each of you supports this effort. But a vote that goes nowhere is not enough. We must also not forget the importance of the Border Security Reform and ensure that this issue does not come up again 20 years from now. In order to have immigration reform, we must have immigration control as part of the discussion. I hope that both sides in this debate – Republicans and Democrats – show a commitment to getting this done.

For decades Congress has tried and failed to deliver broad immigration reform. This situation cannot stand. Now is the time for action. The key is to work on solutions most of you can agree on rather than trying to solve everything at once and risk dividing us all. Let's unite behind a permanent solution DACA and Border security reform and fix it once and for all.